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Shortening supply chains | Thinking Local

OPPORTUNITIES, BARRIERS AND LIMITATIONS | OCTOBER 2025

Overview

On the 18th September 2025, the LUNZ Hub hosted a 'Big Tent Event' in Venue Cymru, Llandudno. As part of the event a series of 'Ask the Expert' breakout sessions explored key topics for a sustainable and just land-use transition. This note outlines the key messages and discussion points from the breakout.

How can food and farm supply chains can be shortened, making them more local and resilient. The conversation explored the economic, environmental, and social benefits of localising supply chains, alongside the practical barriers to scaling. Public procurement was used as a topic of reflection for a future opportunity, with a number of excellent trials and success stories already happening in Wales shared to inspire more opportunities to strengthen connections between producers and consumers.

Panel contributors: Pearl Costello, Food Sense Wales & Gary Mitchell, Powys County Council.
Chair: Alan Radbourne

EVIDENCE & INSIGHTS

Consumer consciousness is rising for interest in local, transparent food systems. For the producer it can provide better market opportunities and a sense of selling to support the local community. For a food system it can provide a resilience to wider shocks.

However, our current food system and procurement is not set up for this sort of shift. Infrastructure gaps, funding pressures on procurement and cost of living challenges for many all make it a significant barrier.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

The session discussed public procurement and public land as a test for opportunities in the local food system. A vision for public land that could produce food for public services was cast – yet the numerous barriers that are in the way were swiftly outlined showing the scale of which to overcome.

Yet, there are many excellent examples of how local food can begin to support local people. Food Sense Wales outlined several initiatives, that although smaller in scale now, are working through the barriers and

showing a practical way forward for a more local food system.

These included:

[Welsh Veg in Schools](#)

[The Future Farms Partnership in Powys](#)

The collaborative work at [Bremenda Isaf Farm](#) in Carmarthenshire

The [Cardiff Planet Card](#)

The work of [Local Food Partnerships](#) across Wales in general and how they are embedded in all the above initiatives.

POLICY & PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

A key question raised was, 'What is local?' The challenges of processing infrastructure, transport routes and other supply chain methods put simply mean our food currently must travel. What can be expected and is feasible with local food production, and how do we balance the urban-rural supply and demand? Another question was on what food is culturally appropriate for diverse groups of people, and how is that factored into local supply chains.

Furthermore, the economic barriers and policy of procurement currently primarily drive the market. How might these structures change so decisions can adequately weigh the cost saving vs the wider benefits to local food production and consumption. There are also new policy considerations coming into play, such as the Welsh Government's Community Food Strategy and the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.

The role that public body estates can play to increase food production was also discussed. There are examples such as Swansea Bay University Health Board who has allocated land to Cae Felin CSA to produce food for the locality and supply into Morriston Hospital. Powys County Council has been leading on to encourage new entrants into horticulture by providing affordable land and homes to growers in its Future Farms pilot farm in Sarn. Or indeed the great work happening in Carmarthenshire to amend school meal menus to align better with seasonality and local production. However, public body assets such as County farm estates are diminishing and are at risk of disappearing altogether under budget pressures and the need to meet statutory duties first.

There is also the question of whether, if the public sector decides overnight to source all its fruit and vegetables from Wales regardless of cost, could it be done? We know that only 8% of fresh food purchased through public procurement is home grown in Wales – giving a massive opportunity for big gains. If this was increased, with much or all of this being grown within organic and agroecological systems this type of food production could be net contributors to nature recovery and carbon reduction. However, as it stands the production is not currently there. This is where projects such as Welsh Veg in Schools are invaluable to driving up the supply, in parallel with using the public sector as a secure market for growers.

Shorter supply chains keep more value local and improve resilience, sometimes up to a 9-fold increase in money retained within the locality.

Infrastructure and procurement are the biggest levers for scaling local food systems that public bodies have – but to put in context over 75% of food is obtained through supermarkets.

Farmers benefit from stronger consumer connections but need policy and business support.

Building local supply chains requires coordination across producers, processors, buyers, and government.

SUMMARY

There are no easy answers to shortening supply chains and seeing a shift in the food system to enable more local consumption, and this session in many ways raised yet more questions. However, the fundamental goals remain, for a resilient, beneficial food system in Wales (and across the UK).

We need to work collaboratively across all sectors to improve our food system, for better health and environmental outcomes. By doing so and by sharing our understanding of some of the ways to overcome the many barriers' improvements can, and will be, made. Government is listening and taking what action it can, our public procurers are beginning to understand the issues better and local communities are helping to deliver on solutions, we just need to do more, and faster

ABOUT LUNZ HUB:

The Land Use for Net Zero (LUNZ) Hub is a consortium of 34 organisations that aims to provide the UK government and devolved administrations with the rapid evidence they need to develop policies that will drive the land use transformation required to achieve Net Zero and other environmental and social targets by 2050.

Partners include experts from research, farming and industry, working across issues including green finance, renewable energy, planning, soil health, afforestation and water management. LUNZ will play a pivotal role in supporting policymaker decision making and helping to communicate more widely the critical importance of land as a carbon sink or source.



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